RESEARCH ESSAY

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The Socio-Spatial Constellation of a Central Vietnamese Village and its Emigrants

This article takes a holistic perspective on migration from a subsistence-oriented rice-farming village in Quảng Nam Province, with special emphasis on the period following the liberalization of domestic movement in Vietnam in the early 1990s.[1] Emigrants from "Bình Yên," about thirty kilometers west of Hội An, have been migrating upland since the 1950s as agricultural settlers, laborers, students, gold diggers, army officers, doctors, teachers, public servants, and entrepreneurs. Emigrants from this village also have a presence in a variety of professions in nearby towns and cities such as Hà Lam, Tam Kỳ and Đà Nẵng, and as far away as Hồ Chí Minh City and Pakse (Laos). By asking where emigrants from a single village in Quảng Nam have gone to and why, this paper aims to illuminate the central Vietnamese peasant experience of the policies and socioeconomic conditions that have driven some of the nation's major migratory movements. The article also maps the social geography that ties members of the Bình Yên "diaspora" back to the village and to each other. While the nature and intensity of the social and economic ties emigrants maintain with Bình Yên differ depending on the period and mode of their migrations, the great majority retain important connections with the home village. How, we will ask, do the Bình Yên locals and emigrants who form this motile milieu conceptualize their places in the socio-spatial

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"constellation" that connects the village to the locations in which its members have settled or reside temporarily to work? We argue that, notwithstanding its significant and cumulative culture of migration, the village remains a powerful center of social gravity for those who have left. This rural social world is an important forum for the judgement and recognition of the usually modest social mobility achieved by the emigrants. We will aim to demonstrate that this meaningful and sympathetic life-world offers respite and recovery from the alienated social and economic relations that typically characterize life in the contexts of resettlement.

The research on which this paper is based grows out of the authors' long personal and professional relationship with Bình Yên. Trung Dinh Dang was born and grew up in Bình Yên, and his mother and brother still live there. He conducted research on land collectivization there in 2004–2006 for his PhD, and visits on a yearly basis. Ashley Carruthers has visited Bình Yên yearly since 2006. In January 2009, the authors stayed in Bình Yên together and then travelled all the way to Ea Súp in Đắk Lắk, near the Cambodian border, visiting emigrants in a great many places along the way, talking to them about their lives and their connections to the village, and participating in family and community gatherings, meals and rituals. This paper is based on these experiences, follow-up interviews conducted by telephone, as well as on Trung Dinh Dang's exhaustive background knowledge about the village and its emigrant families. In addition, official documents on land ownership, population, migration, and earnings in the village also inform the conclusions.

A Brief History of Bình Yên

The people of today's Bình Yên trace their origins back to migrants from Thanh Hóa Province, who came to the formerly Cham lands in the sixteenth century for reasons unknown. The village founder's tomb, recently rebuilt by his descendants, sits next to an ancient banyan tree that marks the traditional entrance to Bình Yên. Members of the founding families still reside in the village, and historical relics, such as a bell etched with the Đặng surname in Hán Nôm characters said to have been carried from the north, can still be found there. Villagers still know the locations of the foundations of the original village communal house [*đình*], Buddhist temple [*chùa*] and Taoist shrine [*miếu*] destroyed in the First Indochina War. While the "founding myth" of the village

gives its inhabitants exclusively Kinh origins, the possibility that the villagers' genealogies are intertwined with those of the Cham peoples of the area should not be ruled out. This is not, however, a narrative that the villagers recognize themselves.

WAR AND POST-WAR

Bình Yên was heavily affected by fighting in both the First Indochina War, in which the village supported the Việt Minh, and in the Second, in which loyalties were split. In the latter war, the central coast was the worst affected region in the south in terms of lives lost and social, economic and ecological destruction. According to Quảng Nam's Department of Statistics, more than two-thirds of the province's agricultural land was abandoned and uncultivated by the end of hostilities in 1975. Hundreds of thousands of people had been killed and injured. Unexploded mines littered the countryside. More than three-quarters of all villages were destroyed, forcing peasants to flee and live together in a few refugee zones and bringing economic activity to a standstill.

Like other villages in the area, Bình Yên was a physical and ideological battleground for both the North and South. Some villagers were conscripted or volunteered to fight for the Republic of Vietnam (RVN), while others joined the National Liberation Front (NLF). Some of those who supported the South became low-ranking officers and government officials during the war, but the actions and choices of these few warranted nothing more than a brief period of reeducation [*học tập cải tạo*] when they returned to the village after the war ended. During the Ngô Đình Diệm period, the village was briefly "pacified" and attempts were made to turn it into a strategic hamlet [*ấp chiến lược*]. The Diệmist mayor was, however, executed by communist forces that still controlled the village at night.[2] After the 1968 Tết Offensive, villagers were forced to live in an enclosed area in the nearby urban center of Hà Lam, until they were allowed to return in 1975. Others rode the fighting out in the Central Highlands, the urban areas of which were relatively peaceful compared to the coastal lowlands of the central provinces. As Bình Yên is far from the coast (about thirty kilometers), opportunities to flee by boat were limited and no Bình Yên residents are believed to have become "boat people" after the war.

Following the end of hostilities, Vietnamese social scientists note, Quảng Nam "faced a severe food shortage and acute unemployment."[3] In interviews

with Trung Dinh Dang, villagers recalled that after the war, people returned home with "two empty hands" [*hai bàn tay trắng*]. Many of the local able-bodied men had died in the war, so families returning to their villages faced "a predicament of sons having lost fathers and wives having lost husbands" [*cảnh con mất cha, vợ mất chồng*]. Moreover, many families lacked the tools necessary for making a living, and weeds fully a metre high had taken over their fields. Bombs and rockets had destroyed much of their land and there were still land mines lurking in some rice fields.

Villagers recalled that the land tenure system had totally changed because land had been abandoned for many years. Previous landlords had fled, and large areas now seemed to have a kind of collective land ownership. People restored any plot they liked as if it were their own. Some reclaimed as much land as their families could manage. Those who came home first could select land close to their houses, and those who came later had to cultivate land farther away. Besides people restoring some parts of the land, the new authorities mobilized villagers to rehabilitate the remaining abandoned lots. The new Thăng Bình district authorities urged villagers from less war-torn communes to help residents in heavily damaged communes. After land restoration, the commune authority, through the local farmers' association [*ban nông hội thôn*], reallocated land to households according to the number of people in their immediate families [*theo nhân khẩu*]. In Bình Yên Village, local authorities only granted communal land [*công điền*] and unclaimed land to landless and land-poor households. Land redistribution gradually occurred, however, as families with more land lent some to their relatives and neighbors.[4] A lady who previously came from a middle-peasant family in a nearby village recalled:

> After liberation we came home with great joy. We did not care much about land. We were happy to cultivate a few plots we'd just restored. It was better to suffer from hunger than be threatened by death in war.[5]

COLLECTIVIZATION TO ĐỔI MỚI

Villagers recalled their living conditions dramatically deteriorating during the work-points period. At the beginning of the collective farming period, the value of a workday in Bình Yên Collective No. 2 was 0.5 kilograms of paddy; later it fell to 0.3 kilograms. An elderly man in the village recalled how "collective farming caused hunger. The value of a workday was 0.3 to 0.5 kilograms

of paddy. How could we live? This amount was not enough to feed a rooster."[6] When asked about their living conditions during this period, villagers often used witty epigrams to respond. For example, they said: "During the work-points period people had so little to eat they had to lick the rice clinging to their chopsticks" [*Lúa điểm là liếm đũa*]; "Working for the collective, you won't have a shred of cloth to cover your privates" [*Hợp tác hợp te không có miếng vải mà che cái lồn*]; and "In the evening, dinner with sweet potatoes to sleep; in the morning, breakfast with sweet potatoes to work; at noon, open up and eat sweet potato again" [*Tối ăn khoai đi ngủ, sáng ăn củ đi làm, trưa về hả hàm nhai khoai*].[7]

From 1981–1988, product contracts were the backbone of collective organizations in Vietnam and especially so in the south. Despite a slight increase in staple-food production from 1981–1985, the income of members from the collective sector had deteriorated because many households could not produce enough to meet the demands of the quotas, and the value of their collective workdays was low.[8] When Renovation [Đổi Mới] officially began in 1986, the performance of agriculture and collective farming in the province had gone down alarmingly.[9] The liberalization of trade associated with Đổi Mới allowed a freer flow of capital and labor, which created more job opportunities outside the collective and left them short of laborers. A former brigade leader in Bình Yên Village recalled:

> In the late 1980s, especially after Đổi Mới, many young peasants abandoned or returned part of their contracted land to the collective so that they could earn a living outside the collective. Some went prospecting for gold in nearby communes or districts and some went on trading. These people often got higher incomes than those clinging to the land. So, many wanted to run off [*muốn chạy ra ngoài*].[10]

The poor performance of collective farming and deteriorating living conditions characterized most parts of Vietnam during 1985–1987, and in many places villagers were going hungry. They accepted less contracted land and even abandoned land, and their debts increased over time. In response, many locations tried new farming arrangements to deal with their local problems. By September 1987, more than 70 percent of collectives in Vietnam used farming arrangements other than the product contract. Realizing that they were not able to reverse the situation, in April 1988, Vietnamese Communist Party leaders

released Resolution No. 10 [Nghị Quyết 10], which actually endorsed informal local practices and arrangements. The resolution marked a new era in Vietnam's agricultural development: the return to household farming. Land was redistributed remarkably equitably in the village, and a situation in which some stayed to work family plots while others tried their luck as migrants and remitted back what money they could became the norm.

BÌNH YÊN TODAY

There are one hundred twenty households in Bình Yên today, with a population of 416 people currently residing in the village and an average of 3.5 per household. Most households have absent members. The average age in the commune is 52, and the infant mortality rate is 0.01 percent. Forty-seven households, or 39 percent, are officially considered poor households [*hộ nghèo*], and in the postwar history of the village only 115 villagers have achieved higher secondary and tertiary qualifications. The village comprises an area of seventy-five hectares, eighteen of which are under rice cultivation and fifty-seven of which are used for housing, other kinds of agriculture and forest. Income from these activities is shown in Table 1. Households have an average of 0.15 hectares of agricultural land per household, or 0.043 hectares per person residing in the household. Households typically earn around 8 million VNĐ per year each from three principal crops. The total average annual net income for a Bình Yên household is 15 million VNĐ.

Upland Migration

Since the 1950s, the villagers of Bình Yên have looked to the highlands of Quảng Nam and Đắk Lắk as sites of temporary and permanent migration.

TABLE 1: Annual Village Income by Principal Crop

Crop	Income
Rice	648,000,000 VNĐ/year
Peanuts	170,000,000 VNĐ/year
Maize	130,000,000 VNĐ/year
Total income from three principal crops	948,000,000 VNĐ/year

In this section, we discuss this migratory path, distinguishing between two main "streams" of upland migrants: farmer-settlers and "professional" migrants.

FARMER-SETTLERS

Upland migration from Bình Yên had already begun in the RVN period as a result of Ngô Đình Diệm's 1957 migration and resettlement policy. As a result of this policy, a community of farmer-settler migrants from the village formed in Krong Pak, in Đắk Lắk Province.[11] This community remains there to this day and still retains kinship, ritual and social links with Bình Yên despite the upheavals experienced during and after the war.

After the village was reestablished following the cessation of hostilities in 1975, the introduction of the household registration system severely limited further upland emigration from Bình Yên. During this period, those who wanted to even go outside their communes had to ask permission from local authorities. Moreover, those boarding buses to the highlands had to show their travel permits [*giấy phép đi lại*] and ID cards [*thẻ chứng minh*] in order to be allowed to travel. Even those who did obtain permission to travel were not excluded from further molestation: one Bình Yên resident recalled that after having visited his relatives in Đắk Lắk, he was not able to bring the few precious kilos of coffee they had given him through a food control station on the way back home.

The next wave of emigration from Bình Yên began in the wake of the Đổi Mới reforms, and in particular, the loosening and then abolition of the travel-permit system. As we saw above, young people who were disillusioned with collective farming rushed to try and find jobs elsewhere. During this time a mini gold rush occurred in nearby villages and mountainous districts of Quảng Nam, such as Khâm Đức, and several young men from the village went as "foraging" migrants, some returning triumphant with modest sums of capital.[12]

The first major migration pathway to open up after Đổi Mới was connected to a 1994 government program to encourage upland settlement. Four families from Bình Yên, who were settled in Ea Súp, Đắk Lắk, some sixty kilometers west of Buôn Mê Thuột and right on the Cambodian border, took advantage of this program. The program granted settlers an initial plot of land and then permitted them to lay claim to as much additional land as they could clear from the rainforest. The government provided settlers with six months' worth

of basic provisions, and nothing substantial beyond this.[13] All four of the families who initially emigrated from Bình Yên to Ea Súp made a success of the move, and all have remained there. Today, emigrants from Bình Yên and its surrounding hamlets have colonized an entire street in Ea Súp.

In the next section, we present three case studies of upland migrants (beginning with the story of someone who aspired to migrate to the highlands but remained in the village) and then offer a preliminary analysis of these migrations in terms of social mobility and identity.

A Restless Youth

Nam had strong yearnings to migrate as a young man, especially when hearing the stories of the jungle, hunting, exotic ethnic minorities, and the riches of the mountains that upland emigrants brought with them when they returned to Bình Yên.[14] Nam and two of his high school friends were won over by these romantic visions and made a pact to run away to the mountains. They got as far as the district bus station, where one of the boys' parents tracked them down and dragged them home. Later, one of the runaway boys did indeed become an upland migrant through the 1994 program discussed above. Nam, however, stayed at home to work the farm, look after the family house, his elderly mother, and take care of the ancestral graves. His father had died in the war and his two brothers had also emigrated: one to study in Huế and subsequently to work in Buôn Mê Thuột, and one to work as an army doctor, now stationed outside the city. Nam inherited all his family's land and property. It took Nam a long time to resolve his desire to migrate. For a time he felt dissatisfied with life as a farmer but accepted that his brothers' departure meant the responsibility of tending to the family graves fell to him. Having received significant financial and other help from his emigrant brothers, Nam is now is very satisfied with his life on the land and still lives in the old family house with his mother, wife and three children. His professional brothers remark that he is very much less stressed than they are!

A Frontiersman

Hải was married with three children before emigrating to Ea Súp. He now has a fourth. He had worked as a gold digger in the early post-Đổi Mới period and was a veteran of the Cambodian occupation. He became familiar with the

Vietnam-Cambodia border region where he now lives through his travels in the military. In Bình Yên, Hải was considered neither poor nor rich. He was, however, known as an adventurous spirit who liked social gatherings, particularly where alcohol was involved. Frontier life, which offers many opportunities to drink in company [*nhậu*], hunt and so on, was well suited to Hải's character.

Hải owned land in Bình Yên as a result of the Resolution 10 reallocation discussed above. However, it was only a small holding (as there were only two people classified as "laborers" in the family) and of poor quality. By contrast, those who volunteered to emigrate to Ea Súp were offered large holdings near the forest, which could be plundered for wood, game and other lucrative forest products. The government allowed settlers to extend their holdings by clearing the jungle and subsidized them with six months' worth of basic provisions. Settlers raised capital initially by selling hardwood and game. This enabled them to accumulate enough capital to modestly mechanize farming in Ea Súp and make up for the lack of manpower (one of the houses we visited boasted a huge Soviet made tractor parked in the garage). Agriculture there is a mix of subsistence and cash crops. The Bình Yên settlers grow wet rice for consumption even though the land is better suited to the cultivation of dry rice. They also cultivate cashews and plan to grow rubber in the near future. Some forest exploitation continues although the jungle has now retreated quite far from the town. A local carpenter hailing from a hamlet neighboring Bình Yên is known to venture far into the forest to find large trees out of which to make ornate chairs and table sets. The forest also remains a source of ingredients for traditional medicines [*thuốc bắc*].

Hải, like the other settlers in Ea Súp, retains a strong sense of identity as a native of Bình Yên. Like the others, he still speaks with an almost impenetrable local accent and makes every effort to return before Tết to tend his ancestors' tombs. His family's main ancestral altar [*bàn giỗ*] and tombs remain in Bình Yên and annual ancestor rituals [*đám giỗ*] are held there rather than in the new settlement. Hải recently sold a piece of land in Ea Súp to raise funds to build a tomb for his mother in Bình Yên. His father and some five siblings and their families remain there. When Hải's son recently got married to the daughter of another family of Quảng Nam settlers in Ea Súp, the ceremony was held there but Hải paid for over ten guests to travel from Bình Yên to attend, as well as other Bình Yên natives living in Đắk Lắk. As a general rule, when Hải has a bit

of spare money, he uses it to make a visit to Bình Yên. Hải's daughter is currently studying in Tam Kỳ, where she lives in a dormitory. On weekends she goes back to Bình Yên and stays with her paternal grandfather.

As mentioned above, emigrants from Bình Yên and surrounding hamlets form a spatially consolidated community on the road into Ea Súp, behind which their fields are located, and tend to form a bloc with the other settlers from Quảng Nam. In the past, these identifications formed the basis for allegiances in conflicts with other settlers hailing from Thái Bình and elsewhere in the north. The members of the Ea Súp community stay in regular touch with friends and family in Bình Yên by mobile phone. Hải even telephoned Trung Dinh Dang in Australia to inform him of his son's forthcoming wedding!

A Coffee Baron

Hùng quit school in year five and tried to find a job as a gold digger, travelling all over to try to make a living. Having relatives in Đắk Lắk who had migrated during the Diệm period, he went there to look for work and eventually bought land there. Now he owns two hectares of coffee plantation. When the coffee price spiked in 1994–1995, Hùng profited and brought money home to build what is still the most magnificent house in the village. Hùng works hard, travelling between Bình Yên and Đắk Lắk frequently to perform necessary tasks in coffee growing and see to his own family's fields at home. He employs both permanent and casual workers on his plantation. Hùng described his situation to us as one of "sacrificing the father's life for that of the son" [*Hy sinh đời bố, củng cố đời con*], and explained he needed money to invest in his children's education. Pointing to Trung Dinh Dang, Hùng said he wanted his children to study like him. Hùng's two-storey house is located on the road to Hà Châu and has a prominent eagle decoration on the front of its brightly painted exterior. Others along the street now compete with Hùng to have the most prosperous-looking house in the village.

ANALYSIS

The "gold rush," and to some extent the other upland movements associated with land and coffee discussed above, can be understood as reactions to the hardships accompanying the end of the period of collectivization and the impossibility of amassing capital through agriculture in Bình Yên in the early years of Đổi Mới. More speculatively, we can read the gold rush emigration

as an exuberant reaction to the spatial "lockdown" of the central planning period.[15] It seems ironically fitting that the advent of the market economy should have been marked by such a frenzied period of primitive accumulation. Significantly, this early upland migration also represents the return of powers of risk-taking and decision-making from the hands of the state to those of individuals. The accounts of these early upland settlers reveal already the presence of a "culture of migration" in the village, visible for instance in Nam's well-developed migration imaginary about the rich, exotic and mysterious highland frontier. Subsequent migratory movements from Bình Yên have, like the gold rush, followed this same logic of the "craze" [*phong trào*], for instance, to go to Hồ Chí Minh City to do factory work. This is but one of the ways in which migration has become a cumulative phenomenon in Bình Yên.

While from the village's point of view these farmer-settlers have achieved some degree of material success, they are not considered to have undergone significant social mobility, or to have substantially redefined their identities. Their physical move to the uplands is not a symbolic move upwards. While farmer-settlers may be more inclined than non-migrants to see themselves as having moved up in the world, evidence for their sharing of the village-centric interpretation of their migration is to be found in their retaining of strong Quảng Nam accents and rustic rural manners. Using the term "diaspora" to describe them no doubt does some violence to that term, but, like diasporic subjects, they do indeed continue to powerfully define themselves in terms of their relation to the "homeland" (the village) or "*quê*" and seek to reproduce aspects of its homeliness in the process of building enduring dwellings in this distant frontier, right down to the nostalgic cultivation of wet rice. Indeed the preference for mountainous frontier regions over lowland urban resettlement destinations can be partially explained by the fact that it is easier to maintain one's primordial local identity in the uplands. Since all of the Kinh on this upland frontier are migrants, no one regional identity can claim hegemonic status, and thus there is no pressure to assimilate. By contrast, migrants to the lowland cities must deal with the experience of discrimination against their provincial origins and accents, face the pressures of assimilation to urban speech and styles, and accept the possibility that their sense of identity might undergo transformation. Ironically, then, some of the most permanent emigrants from Bình Yên are also those who continue to identify with it the most powerfully.

PROFESSIONAL MIGRANTS

Another key migration trajectory dating back to the pre-Đổi Mới period has been that associated with education, public service and professional development. Early emigrants from Bình Yên included those from "revolutionary families" who obtained government positions in Đắk Lắk, Đà Nẵng, Tam Kỳ, Hà Lam, and elsewhere. Before Đổi Mới, these village emigrants were important contact points for people from Bình Yên who wanted to access services located in the cities, especially hospitals. They were also important sources of information on and introductions to government jobs, as well as sources of accommodation for villagers visiting the city. A very small number of people from Bình Yên who had impeccable "revolutionary" family histories were able to become contract labor migrants to Eastern Europe or obtain permission to visit the Soviet Bloc for educational purposes. We will discuss the story of one such migrant below.

Still the most prestigious way to exit Bình Yên is as a university entrant. However, given the competitiveness of university entrance exams, very few from the village have succeeded in this course. A popular saying among high school students in the 1990s was that "The road to university is so hard that if ten walk it, nine will fall by the wayside" [*Đường vô đại học cao vời vợi, mười đứa thi vô chín đứa rơi*]. Some failed university aspirants are still able to enter colleges and get certificates of higher education or obtain other qualifications from occupational training colleges [*trường dạy nghề*]. Some who find work in public service are able to upgrade their qualifications to a bachelor's degrees in service [*học tại chức*], a process that is helped by having a "good family biography" [*lý lịch tốt*], meaning, for instance, that one's family was involved in the revolutionary struggle and perhaps lost some members in the war.

Another popular course of professional emigration has been to take a job as a primary school teacher in an ethnic minority area, which required lower qualifications until the late 1990s. Given the very small number of government positions available within the commune, some villagers have opted for this voluntary exile as a means to amass capital and achieve professional status. After working for a number of years in an ethnic minority school in the highlands, one becomes a permanent staff member [*biên chế*], and thus qualifies to work in an ethnic Vietnamese school in the coastal lowlands. A number of people from Bình Yên have pursued this trajectory.

The army has provided an avenue to professional qualifications for a small number of people, such as the case of a village man who became an army doctor and is now a part-time private pharmacist and general practitioner in Đắk Lắk. Another Bình Yên native is a permanent staff officer in the border defence force of an ethnic minority area. Other university and college qualified emigrants from the village work in traditional medicine in private practice and in the public prosecutor's office in Đắk Lắk.

A Village Policeman

Cường failed the university entrance exam and went to Đắk Lắk, where his brother is a secondary school teacher. He found a job as an assistant for the people's committee of a remote commune in the province, then, having gained this experience, sought out a job back home in Bình Yên Commune. Cường's father worked for the district authorities before his death and was a communist party member, as was his mother. Owing to his family's excellent history, he found a job as a policeman in his natal village and became a member of the communist party himself. Cường is now obtaining a law degree under a government-sponsored "work and study" program [học tại chức]. One of the still-attractive features of public service employment is that it gives one access to tertiary education without having to succeed in the direct competition of university entrance exams. While Cường's migrant experience was brief, it nevertheless enabled him to get ahead in that he was able to accumulate valuable government work experience outside the commune. He now lives with his mother and works the family's land in addition to his job. Cường is a rare example of someone who has achieved social mobility and professional status by staying in the village, despite not being an outstanding student. Jobs such as his are both rare and undesirable to many young people, especially those with high school degrees. People consider Cường to be a competent and ambitious young man and speculate that he will one day go to the district authority level.

An Army Doctor

Kiên comes from a poor peasant family. His father died in the war and left his mother with three young boys. He is the eldest brother. Although his family's economic life was difficult and he had to help his mother do farm work, he

was eager to learn and completed a high school degree. Soon after that he was recruited into the army and was chosen to be trained as an army doctor—thanks to his higher school qualifications, good handwriting and "studenty looks." After training he served in the field for three years and returned when Vietnam withdrew its troops from Cambodia.

After returning from Cambodia, Kiên continued to serve in the army in Quảng Ngãi for four years. During that time he provided financial support for his youngest brother to pursue a bachelor's degree in economics. In 1995 he married a pharmacist from Quảng Ngãi, and in 1997 he was transferred to serve in Đắk Lắk. His wife eventually joined him and to supplement his army income they opened a private pharmacy-clinic to serve the local population, both Kinh and non-Kinh. The business is quite successful, owing not least to the local proclivity for brawling after drinking and the frequency of crashes on the busy road to Buôn Mê Thuột. When we stayed with Kiên in Đắk Lắk, there was a near-constant stream of patients for the clinic.

Kiên owns an extremely fine and large house that lacks none of the modern conveniences. He now has three children, who he takes to visit his mother in Quảng Nam on the occasions of Tết, summer holidays, his father's death anniversary [*ngày giỗ*], and for other significant events. Kiên has also financially supported his brother Nam, and has contributed money for ancestral rituals and to repair family graves.

A School Teacher

Hưng was born in 1978, the only son of a middle-peasant family with three children. His parents and grandparents invested a great deal in him and hoped that he could enter university like their neighbors' children. Hưng failed the university entrance exam despite making two attempts. Like many of his friends, he subsequently enrolled in a course to qualify as a primary teacher in an ethnic minority school in the Phước Sơn District of Quảng Nam (of which Khâm Đức is the district capital) and has lived there since 1999. His wife, a girl from a village near Bình Yên, is also a primary teacher there.

Hưng still views his residence in the highlands as temporary and recently bought some land in Đà Nẵng as an investment, perhaps signalling his intention to move there someday. We met Hưng in Đà Nẵng at the house of Phượng, another member of the Bình Yên diaspora, while he was in the city looking for

land to invest in with a purse of 60 million VNĐ. He told us that because he lives in a mountainous area where there are not many things to spend money on, he and his wife are able to save a large part of their salaries. Teachers in mountainous areas receive higher salaries compared to those in the lowlands thanks to additional financial assistance from the government. Hưng also told us that his two younger sisters planned to take jobs as primary teachers in the mountains on his recommendation.

ANALYSIS

The emigrants discussed in the case studies above all have in common the fact that they have pursued professional qualifications through (undesirable) public service jobs located in remote areas, an effective means of strategizing around their structural exclusion from higher education as poor provincials.[16] In each of these cases, migration to the highlands, even if only temporary, has proven pivotal in the subject's accession to "professional" status. While Kiên appears comfortably settled outside of Buôn Mê Thuột, Hưng and Cường's upward migrations are strategies of upskilling aimed at eventually returning to the lowlands. They have been willing to take "hardship posts" in a region that, from a lowland Kinh perspective, is seen as remote, unhomely and civilizationally inferior. In ascending the mountains, one goes up geographically, but down symbolically. Ironically, the migrants discussed above turn this devalued frontier zone into one of empowering self-transformation: the uplands become a "bridge" [*cầu nối*], as people say, by which one returns to the lowlands with professional status and a permanent salary.

While from the perspective of the urban middle classes the social mobility achieved by the poor village policeman or ethnic minority school teacher is minute if not invisible, from the viewpoint of the village these emigrants have significantly redefined their social identities by exiting the peasantry. Rather than specifically referring to social mobility or class, people in the village refer to those who have acceded to professional urban lifestyles as "happy" [*sướng*], characterized by the physically light and non-dirty work they do, as opposed to those who live rural lifestyles that are "miserable" [*khổ*], characterized by difficult and dirty work. A third category, "being a big man" [*làm ông lớn*], is reserved for those who ascend to high official positions. Notably, while Bình Yên villagers do not tolerate urban airs from migrants returning from the

factories of Sài Gòn and Đà Nẵng, they are much more understanding and tolerant of the fact that professional migrants may have adopted city accents and bodily styles, signalling that they consider them to have undergone an authentic transformation of social identity.

These divergent migratory "streams" help us understand that migration to the uplands is by no means homogeneous: the destinations and the pathways differ markedly and very much determine the status migrants are accorded and the identities they may assume back in the village.

Lowland Migrants

While lowland migration paths are somewhat more diverse and complex than upland paths, they too are characterized by a marked distinction between "professional" and "non-professional" trajectories. As the non-state sector has expanded, education outside the village increasingly leads to employment in the private sector, or to self-employment in the small business sector. In terms of prestige, it is unclear as to whether private or government positions now carry the most status back in Bình Yên. In addition, one needs to appreciate the fact that getting a good government job is not an easy matter, since these positions are scarce, one needs contacts, and often, one needs to know whom to bribe.

One example of an entrepreneurial migrant is Sắc, a young man who pursued an economics degree in Đà Nẵng. Being born with a malformed hip joint, Sắc briefly considered a "relaxed" government job in the mountainous region where his brother lives. A stable office environment, he thought, would be a place where his limited mobility would not pose a major challenge. After getting advice from friends and family, however, he decided against public service and threw himself energetically into founding an internet cafe and a very successful factory-canteen catering business in the provincial capital of Tam Kỳ. Phục, another young man from Bình Yên, earned a business administration degree and subsequently found a job in a private company in Đà Nẵng. He decided to work in the private sector because of the higher remuneration. Less qualified emigrants from Bình Yên also work in the private sector, such as those who provide motorbike taxi services [*xe thổ*] and itinerant merchants [*nhà bán rong*] in Hà Lam, the district capital, located on Highway 1 at the turnoff to Bình Yên.

The rapid growth of the manufacturing sector since the advent of Đổi Mới means that factory work has become a major source of extra-village

employment for emigrants from Bình Yên. In the early 1990s, youths from the village emigrated to distant Hồ Chí Minh City to work in the new factories. Women often worked in textile companies while men did metalwork or construction. While one man in the village was infamous for blowing all the wages he earned in Sài Gòn on alcohol and prostitutes and not remitting anything, most migrants diligently send back as much of their earnings as they can save. Because of this influx of migrant workers, industrial parks were established in Đà Nẵng and on its periphery. The proximity of these factory zones means that the largely female workforce employed in them can live and work in Đà Nẵng during the week and then return on their days off to fulfil family obligations and even help with agricultural work.

A small number of families in the village are now split between town and country as mothers work during the week and live in dormitories in Đà Nẵng and children stay at home with their fathers and grandparents. Four women that we know of from Bình Yên work in factories in Đà Nẵng. The recent construction boom in Đà Nẵng has also created employment opportunities for men from the village, including middle-aged men who are more likely to be seasonal migrant laborers, while women typically reside in Đà Nẵng for a number of years before marriage.

Apart from those who worked in the Eastern Bloc before Đổi Mới, no one from Bình Yên has yet become a transnational labor migrant, and transnational marriage migration is virtually unknown (only two from the village are known to be living in Laos; one is a doctor married to a Lao citizen while the other is a carpenter). We encountered a possible sign of things to come, however, in the cafe closest to the village, where the authors met by chance a young man who had just returned home for the Tết holiday from Korea, where he worked in Busan in a factory making fittings for ships. Sporting a highly fashionable leather jacket and a very racy new motor scooter, this returnee told us that so many were migrating from his commune that people had started to call it "Korea Village" [Làng Hàn Quốc].

A Veteran Factory Worker

Phượng attended junior high school but failed the entrance exam for senior high. Thanks to her excellent family history and her relatives being cadres

[*cán bộ*] in Đà Nẵng, she was selected to go to Hungary as a contract laborer in the mid 1980s. She worked as a factory laborer there for a few years and then returned to Vietnam during the chaotic period after the demise of communism in the Eastern Bloc. Unlike most other contract labor workers, Phượng came back to the village with little savings, and it was rumored that she was cheated by her cunning lover, who was originally from Hải Phòng.

Phượng lived in the village but did not engage in farm work, and she searched for any opportunity to escape country life. Eventually, she found a job as a seafood packer for an export processing company in Đà Nẵng. She married a man from Đà Nẵng and settled there. Her house has become a contact point for Bình Yên villagers visiting the city and serves as accommodation for relatives, including a niece who is living there while studying.

Carruthers met Phượng in Bình Yên while she was attending a *đám giỗ* in her parents' house. She insisted that he and Trung Dinh Dang visit her on their return to Đà Nẵng, which they did, running into Hưng (above) in the process. Phượng was intensely proud of her humble two-storey house located in a narrow alley in the suburbs of the city and told us that she considered this kind of lifestyle far better than that lived by many people back in the village ("Như vậy cũng tốt hơn nhiều người ở quê").

A Young Entrepreneur

Sắc went to high school in Buôn Mê Thuột, boarding with a family member from Bình Yên while he did so. He failed the entrance examination for Tây Nguyên University, and then went to Hồ Chí Minh City and sold lottery tickets for a time. His uncle's death in an accident drew him back to Bình Yên and he took a job in a brick factory in Hà Lam, taking evening classes in accountancy and eventually enrolling in an economics degree in Đà Nẵng. With some seed capital of a few thousand dollars contributed by his relatives and friends, and introduced to the opportunity by a university friend, Sắc started a factory-canteen catering business in Tam Kỳ. He also opened an internet cafe there. Once he had graduated, Sắc married his longtime girlfriend from the neighboring commune. She quit her job at a Taiwanese toy factory in Đà Nẵng and went to work in their new businesses. Sắc is now his family's main breadwinner and he supports his mother and some of his siblings.

A Diligent Student

Châu is the only daughter of a woman who failed to find a marriage partner due to the shortage of men after the war. It is believed that her father is one of the village men but this has never been officially recognized. Despite her family's economic difficulties and being fatherless, Châu was eager to get an education in order to escape being a farmer and to be able to help her mum out of poverty. After graduating from high school, she enrolled in a college in Tam Kỳ. She decided to become a primary teacher because this is a short course and therefore affordable for her mum. Besides, she wants to get a job as soon as possible in order to help her family. Châu sometimes goes home on the weekend to help her mother with farm work and carries some rice back to the city. In order to supplement her study and living costs, she found a job as a waitress in a café in Tam Kỳ. Châu's hobby is watching movies and Vietnamese pop music on TV. Her favorite movies are Korean ones. She said that she prefers Korean movies over western ones because they are closer to her culture and understanding. She also said that if there was an opportunity she would be willing to go abroad because, she believes, living conditions overseas are better than those in Vietnam.

A Pioneer Factory Worker

Trinh was one of the first in the village to migrate to Hồ Chí Minh City as a factory worker. Hearing about the ease of finding work in the city from the very first Sài Gòn labor migrant from her village, Trinh was overcome with excitement about big city life and proposed dropping out of junior high school immediately to study as a seamstress in order to get a job in a textile factory. Her mother opposed this plan, but Trinh stuck to her purpose and eventually prevailed. In 1995, at the age of 21, Trinh was working in a Taiwanese-owned textile factory in Sài Gòn. She eventually married a man from Sài Gòn. Trinh still works in the same factory and lives in Hóc Môn, one of the city's outer suburbs. She continues to remit money to her mother in Bình Yên and goes home to visit her regularly. She helped her brother migrate to Hồ Chí Minh City and remains something of a contact point for people from the village wishing to visit and move to the big city. A number of the early labor migrants to Sài Gòn remain there, and a quasi-formal Compatriots' Association [Hội Tổ

Chúc Đồng Hương] links people from Bình Yên and the surrounding communes. Trinh still socializes with these contemporaries and before her marriage was active in the meetings that the association holds back in Bình Yên and its environs.

A Worker between Village and City

When Carruthers visited Bình Yên for the first time in 2006 he met "Mỹ" while she was out in the fields harvesting rice with a sickle. Mỹ explained that she had taken her annual holiday in order to help with the harvest and that her husband looks after their seven-year-old daughter while she works for a Taiwanese toy factory in Đà Nẵng, some sixty kilometers away. Mỹ gets a day off every Sunday and has twelve days of annual leave per year.

At that time she was earning 750,000 VNĐ (less than 60 US dollars) per month, a level of pay that has since been negotiated after a recent strike. Prior to that, she and her fellow workers were paid 200,000–300,000 VNĐ a month, which was in fact below the legal minimum wage at that time. Out of her pay of 750,000 VNĐ, Mỹ spent some 200,000 VNĐ per month on rent (she lived in a shared rented room in the city with other women from her village and its surroundings) and 300,000 VNĐ at the canteen. By taking rice from the village and making other economies, she was able to save 500,000 VNĐ a month.

ANALYSIS

While laborers come second to students in terms of total emigrant numbers from Bình Yên (forty-seven secondary and tertiary students versus twenty-three migrant workers), the case studies above reveal the importance of the urban manufacturing sector in more recent emigration from the village. Indeed, the industrial parks would appear to be the "new highlands." As a means of amassing capital investment for the village, migrating to the industrial zones is a far more straightforward proposition than migrating upland. As we have seen above, upland migration, other than that connected to seasonal labor migration (for instance on coffee plantations), is aimed at longer term and often more indirect strategies of social mobility and capital accumulation. Another virtue of the Đà Nẵng industrial zones is that they are close enough for

emigrants like Mỹ to keep one foot in the village while working in the city. Mỹ and her husband even manage to split family life, apparently successfully, across this spatial divide. This way of arranging the family establishes new sets of ties between village and city, for instance in terms of reciprocal flows of money, rice, labor, communications—and even affection, as Mỹ performs the duties of distant mothering, balancing her roles as family breadwinner and caregiver.

The social status of urban factory workers is ambiguous. From the point of view of the village, this is the least prestigious form of migration and does not confer any positive transformation of identity or social status—for instance by association with urban modernity. While once the disparity between incomes from agriculture and those from factory work were substantial, this is no longer the case. People in the village also consider it a sign of lesser status that most factory workers rent rather than own their accommodations, while in the village people own their houses. Further, cities are associated in the village imaginary with crime, drugs and social deviance.

Trinh, when recalling the experience of returning to Bình Yên from Sài Gòn, spoke of how the early factory migrants had to transform their speech and embodiment both when leaving and returning to the village. Suffering discrimination as "dark-skinned" rural neophytes in the city, these Quảng Nam villagers were quick to pick up a Sài Gòn accent to make themselves lesser targets of price inflation [*bị chọc quê*] and other unscrupulous behavior. On returning home, however, they were careful to "drop" [*bỏ*] their Sài Gòn accents at Hà Lam, the town on Highway 1 at the turnoff to Bình Yên, for fear of being "scolded" [*sợ người ta chửi*]. This fear was perhaps founded on having seen other returnees who tried to parade their city ways back in the village being brought down a peg or two. In Trinh's recollection, the process of adjusting to city life was far more difficult than that of readjusting to village life. Although she married a Sài Gòn man, she never felt that she had really become a city person—indeed, Hóc Môn is but part of Sài Gòn's peri-urban periphery—and thus, renegotiating social recognition and acceptance back in the village was never a problem. The fact that Trinh and the other labor migrants were remitting money regularly to their families back in the village no doubt made their return easier and any urban style they may have (unknowingly) cultivated all the more palatable to their peers and elders.[17] Perhaps these women are

comparable to the Thai factory workers discussed by Mary Beth Mill, who negotiate a space in which they are urban and rural at the same time.[18]

This village-centric social judgement does not however prevent all working-class emigrants from associating themselves with the symbolic capital conferred by urban lifestyles. Phượng's insistence on our visiting her humble house on the outskirts of Đà Nẵng was very probably more than simple hospitality. Despite the flooded, garbage-strewn alleyway outside and the humble nature of her property, Phượng sought recognition from us of her claim on an urban identity and lifestyle, and indeed of her superiority over those back in the village.

We can gain further insight into this desire to live in the city and take advantage of the opportunities that may present themselves there by considering the remittance patterns of urban workers. While in the case of Mỹ, for instance, labor migration is clearly a familial strategy aimed at maximizing remittances, for others, going to the city for work as a factory worker, or for men, as a semipermanent seasonal labor migrant, may well be a product of individual calculations and desires. Many urban labor migrants do not send regular remittances back home, but rather, send money only on special occasions, such as ancestor rituals, weddings, or Tết, or when a sum is needed for a specific expense, such as school fees or medical costs. Villagers accept that life in the city is expensive and, in the case of young single migrants especially, that money will be withheld for expenditure on urban habits like drinking, smoking, coffee, karaoke, and perhaps even massage. It is understood that the costs of participating in urban youth culture will soak up a significant part of migrants' earnings, and that the experience of this culture is part of the motivation for wanting to be in the city. Even if emigrants fail to remit money, their absence from the village may be seen to be a positive thing, because at least they are removing the cost of their upkeep from their own families.

Explaining Emigration from Bình Yên

EVOLUTION OF MIGRATION PATHWAYS

This survey of postwar emigration from Bình Yên shows how villagers have used mobility as a response to the changing configurations of constraint and opportunity that have accompanied transformations in the larger regional and

TABLE 2: Emigrants by Numbers, Destinations, Employment and Motivations

Period		Number of households, people, or names of immigrants	Destination	Motivation
Before 1975		5 households	Đắk Lắk	Policy of Ngô Đình Diệm government
1975–1986		9 households	Đà Nẵng, Tam Kỳ, Hà Lam,	Working for government offices, or making a living otherwise
1986–2000				
	Emigrants working in the public service, health or education	5	Đắk Lắk, mountainous regions of Quảng Nam	Moved to the location of the job
	Migrant labor in the cities	23	Sài Gòn, Đà Nẵng,	Left school early, youth emigration "craze"
	Emigrants in the uplands [*vùng cao*]	4 households	Ea Súp	Poverty, little land, many children: followed voluntary migration program
	Commerce	Unknown		
	Cultivating coffee in Đắk Lắk	1		No means of profit in the village

2000–present				
	Public service, health, education	18	Quảng Nam highlands	
	Migrant and seasonal labor	23	Đà Nẵng, Sài Gòn, Quảng Nam	No opportunities to make money in the village
	Permanent Migrants [*Di dân định cư*]			
	Business	4	Quảng Nam, Đà Nẵng, Sài Gòn, Đắk Lắk	Entrepreneurship
	Secondary and tertiary students	47	Đà Nẵng, Sài Gòn, Quảng Nam, Qui Nhơn…	

national contexts in which the village is embedded. Over time, we see a pluralization of migration types, pathways and destinations. In this evolution, a historical shift in the logics of migration from state-driven to market-driven is evident. The upland settlers who went to Ea Súp were, at least to some extent, participants in a state project of the Vietnamization, sedentarization and deforestation of the Central Highlands that has a history going back to the 1950s, although implemented by different regimes. While these families' decisions to migrate were voluntary, their migration pathway was significantly shaped by state desires—although the success and longevity of this migration is better understood in terms of how it satisfied individual and familial aspirations.

Other early migration strategies that we have examined were also dependent on the state sector as a source of employment and a resource for further training and education. It should be noted that a "good family history," connoting adherence to the national project of state socialism, was a requirement for accessing the state-sanctioned pathways of individual and familial social mobility that existed in the army and in public service. We have seen how Bình Yên emigrants such as Kiên and Hưng used these pathways, in combination with strategic upland migrations, to achieve professional status, acquire property and, in the case of Kiên, to establish a business in the private sector while retaining permanent staff status.

Opportunities for professionalization and social mobility in the state sector continue to offer a migration pathway, although they are arguably less important and prestigious than they once were. Professional employment in the private sector and entrepreneurship are now attractive possibilities for educated Bình Yên emigrants such as Sắc, who chose this path over that of working in public service to great success. The role of markets in stimulating migration is most visible in the movement of workers from Bình Yên to Đà Nẵng to work in the city's newly established export manufacturing sector. The gendered nature of the new labor market selects out young (mostly single) female migrants who, as elsewhere in the world where such labor regimes exist, can typically cope with only a few years of the harsh pace of factory work before they return to roles as wives, mothers and farmers.[19] Trinh and Phượng are exceptions to this rule in having stayed in the same factories for significant periods.

This shift from state-initiated migration to migration based on individual and familial decisions about market-dictated opportunities reflects the gradual

retreat of the Vietnamese state from the sphere of social life and its reduced role in the post-Đổi Mới labor market. Of course, the presence of foreign-invested industrial parks in Đà Nẵng is a result of state policy, but the state has not found it necessary to attempt to control or dictate the migratory dynamics they produce—apart from making policy pronouncements that further affirm the centrality of urban and industrial life and relegate the agricultural sector to a low status past. As we shall see below, Bình Yên locals and emigrants have their own critique of this discourse and their own ways of valuing and preserving the social world of their subsistence village.

MOTIVATIONS

Our interviews, observations and experiences lead us to conclude that "push" factors, such as overpopulation, land pressure, poverty, and hunger, do not sufficiently explain emigration from Bình Yên. Of course, land pressure cannot be discounted, but it tends to inform migration decisions in an implicit rather than explicit way. Despite significant emigration, the social structure, agricultural practices, and land tenure patterns of Bình Yên have remained remarkably stable. Cases of entire families emigrating and selling all of their land are all but unknown. Some forced sales of land have occurred in the village, but the general rule is that land changes hands most often as a result of inheritance rather than sale.

Far more important are the various "pull" factors: the lure of adventure and riches in the uplands; the draw of professional qualifications and modern urban lifestyle in the cities; the chance of amassing capital by working in the industrial zones. In short, the desire for self improvement and to advance the lot of one's family are major factors in emigration from Bình Yên. A Confucian ideology of social advancement, and social competition with neighboring villages, is no doubt at play here. In many of the migration strategies described above, one sees a desire to escape the low status ascribed to farming, reflected in the modern (near) reversal of the traditional Confucian hierarchy of Mandarin (or scholar), farmer, artisan, merchant [*sĩ, nông, công, thương*] to Mandarin, merchant, artisan, farmer [*sĩ, thương, công, nông*].

Theorists of domestic migration in developing nations often stress that emigrants are typically not the most disadvantaged but rather among the most

able members of a given migrant-sending population. Although there is not significant social differentiation in Bình Yên, this observation is mostly confirmed by our research. We note that those with access to capital, education, career advice, and support from their social networks, and in the past those possessing the cultural capital of "good family backgrounds," have been more likely to succeed as entrepreneurial and professional migrants. By contrast, those who left the village as farmer-settlers and industrial workers were only marginally, if at all, less disadvantaged relative to other villagers.

We did not observe any strong correlation of emigration with position in the rural opportunity structure (for instance a tendency for migrants to be second and third sons). One explanation for this is that there is no acute land pressure in Bình Yên. Within a given family there will almost always be a number of siblings who desire to emigrate, while there will also be siblings who want to stay and work the land and care for their elderly parents and ancestors' graves. In this way, the question of who will work the land tends to take care of itself.

We have some sympathy with New Economic Theory arguments that interpret rural-urban migration in developing nations as a risk management response to the unreliability of harvests, the absence of social safety nets and the weakness of credit markets.[20] Certainly one can read emigration from Bình Yên, especially the upland settler migration of the early post-collectivization years when the immediate future of agriculture in the village was uncertain, in terms of risk diversification. In more recent years, one can also interpret the relationship between the factory economy and the village in terms of risk management, although not in the manner suggested by New Economic Theory. Given the reliability of harvests and the capacity of the land to more than support its population under the post-Đổi Mới land tenure arrangements, one cannot read urban labor migration purely as a response to the risks of farming. Factory work has provided access to the cash economy and made modest capital accumulation possible, while the subsistence agricultural base of the village potentially provides a safety net for those employed in unstable, demanding and even dangerous work in the manufacturing sector. This opportunistic labor migration is itself made possible by the stability of the village base, exemplified in the bags of rice the workers take back with them from the village to the city.

Conclusion

As suggested in our title, we view the village as being loosely at the center of the social and spatial constellation formed by its small communities of emigrants. This constellation, as we have seen, is certainly not without its hierarchies of places, trajectories and occupations. We have seen how a hierarchical relationship between uplands and lowlands, characterized as Kinh and ethnic minority spaces, heartland and frontier, civilized and uncivilized, and so on, operates in the villagers' migration strategies and migratory imaginaries. We have also seen, however, that valued social trajectories, such as those from peasant to professional, can crosscut this spatial ranking. Similarly, migration to urban areas is not defined solely in terms of the destination, but also the activity engaged in there, with education still conferring the most prestige.

The continued salience of the village in the lives of the emigrants reflects the voluntary and aspirational character of emigration from Bình Yên. While many were motivated by the desire to escape the difficult and low-status life of the farmer, emigrants retain a strong sense of the dignity of rural life and take very seriously their continued social obligations back in the village. Whether consciously or not, the villagers of Bình Yên have not introduced significant cash cropping and have resisted the commoditization of land back at "home"—even if, as in the case of the Ea Súp settlers, they have participated in these things enthusiastically in their new locations.

One can speculate that this represents both an economic and a cultural "choice." The maintenance of subsistence farming makes sense in that it ameliorates the risks and costs of migration. Factory workers in Đà Nẵng take rice back from the village to the city to reduce their living costs there, for instance, and in times of economic downturn, which impacts the exposed export manufacturing sector harshly and immediately, the village provides a safety net to which unemployed factory workers can return. The maintenance of the post-Đổi Mới status quo in the village also arguably helps to maintain its role as the center of social gravity of the Bình Yên "diaspora." The village is the place where significant rituals such as death anniversaries are performed, where important social relationships are located, and from where many migrants continue to draw their core sense of identity. An additional reason for the preservation of the village social world is the fact that it is the milieu in which the migrants'

social mobility—often a minute one that may be invisible from the perspective of the social mainstream—can be recognized and rewarded.

Emigrants participate in the cash economy and endure alienated social relations in the uplands, cities and factories. When they return to Bình Yên they return to a world of tradition, warm social ties and a moral economy. One must of course be wary of idealizing a village world of pure gemeinschaft, and indeed Bình Yên is not untouched by market relations and social alienation. Nevertheless, this social dualism is a salient construct to the villagers and migrants alike and helps them to make sense of the social worlds within and without Bình Yên. An alternative to understanding the social inside and outside of Bình Yên in dualistic terms of gemeinschaft and geselleschaft is to consider the village a site of communitas, enacted above all in the ritual and festive gatherings that accompany events like weddings, ancestor rituals, grave cleaning, and Tết. Prior to Tết, for instance, Bình Yên is abuzz with news of distant friends and relatives conveyed by returnees who have come to tend to their parents' graves and prepare for the Tết celebrations. This is a time of intense social networking as emigrants from diverse areas renew contact and share information on life and opportunities in the cities and highlands, and make arrangements to help prospective emigrants find their feet in the cities and elsewhere. The presence of the returnees at such moments of heightened effect helps the residents feel a sense of belonging in the midst of a vibrant community (a feeling that might not be there in everyday experience), while an awareness of absent friends and families gives a sense of aesthetic reflexivity to the experience of being present in the village.

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to understand the patterns and experiences of migration from a subsistence rice-farming village in Quảng Nam Province. Emigration from Bình Yên ranges from circular and seasonal migration to the cities and central highlands for construction, forestry and plantation work; semi-permanent migration to Đà Nẵng and the south for work in the manufacturing and service sectors; and more permanent migration to Hà Lam, Tam Kỳ, Đà Nẵng, Hồ Chí Minh City and elsewhere for education, trading, business, and professional employment. In addition, people from Bình Yên have engaged in assisted settlement migration to frontier zones in Đắk Lắk Province since the time of the Ngô Đình Diệm regime. By examining migration from the perspective of the village, the paper aims to illuminate the central Vietnamese peasant experience of the policies and socioeconomic conditions that have driven some of the nation's major migratory movements. The authors also map the social geography that ties members of the Bình Yên diaspora back to the village and to each other. Emigrants participate in the cash economy and endure alienated social relations in the cities and factories. When they return to Bình Yên they return to a world of tradition, warm social ties and a moral economy. Given this relationship, the paper asks, how do Bình Yên's locals and emigrants conceptualize their places in the socio-spatial "constellation" that connects the village to the locations in which its members have settled or found temporary work?

KEYWORDS: *central Vietnam, domestic migration, social mobility, identity, land reform, social capital*

Notes

1. Bình Yên is not a pure subsistence economy in that villagers will sell surplus crops, especially rice, as well as livestock and other produce in order to raise capital. Surplus rice is often stored and used as a "bank" for future expenses, for instance when cash is needed for a wedding gift. However, the pattern of planting and livestock rearing is only minimally responsive to the market.
2. The National Liberation Front (NLF) in Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng had recruited a large number of revolutionaries who operated locally or were sent to the North for training. Despite the surrender or death of many revolutionaries from the late 1960s to the early 1970s, their numbers were still considerable. Quảng Nam's records show that during the war the Bình Lãnh Commune suffered severe damage. At the war's climax, many NLF revolutionaries were killed and many families had to flee. However, at least twenty-five revolutionary soldiers and twenty other revolution-supporting families still operated and lived in the Bình Lãnh Commune. Likewise, the Thăng Phước Commune of Thăng Bình District was reportedly "wiped clean" [*bị xoá trắng*] of its revolutionary base because people fled or were forced to live together in a few areas controlled by the Sài Gòn government. Despite near-annihilation, the number of surviving revolutionaries in the commune still holding on [*bám trụ*] was enough to fill key positions in the postwar communal and subcommunal authorities [*chính quyền thôn*] and even labor exchange teams [*tổ đổi công*]. Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng and other areas in the central coast thus did not face a huge problem in filling government and party positions thanks to the large number of local revolutionaries who survived and others who returned from northern Vietnam.
3. Cục Thống Kê Quảng Nam [Quảng Nam Statistics Office], *Quảng Nam 30 Năm Xây Dựng Và Phát Triển* [Quảng Nam: 30 Years of of Building and Development] (Tam Kỳ: Cục Thống Kê Quảng Nam, 2005), 22.
4. Interviews, October–December 2005, Bình Yên.
5. Interview, October 15, 2005, Bình Yên.
6. Interview, October 31, 2005, Bình Yên.
7. A more literal translation of these sayings would be: "Rice points, lick chopsticks"; "Collaborate, collective, not a shred of cloth to cover your cunt"; "In the evening eat some yam, go to sleep; in the morning eat some tuber, go to work; at noon open your jaw and gnaw more yam."
8. "Khoán sản phẩm cuối cùng đến người lao động những vướng mắc và cách giải quyết" [The Production Contract: Problems and Solutions], *Báo Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng* [The Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng News], November 8, 1984.

9. Staple food production in Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng fell from 540,000 tons in 1985 to 463,000 tons in 1987. See "Sơ kết sản xuất nông nghiệp năm chuẩn bị vụ sản xuất đông xuân tới" [Preliminary Summary of 1987 Agricultural Production], *Báo Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, September 17, 1987.
10. Interview, December 9, 2005, Bình Yên.
11. Andrew Hardy, *Red Hills: Migrants and the State in the Highlands of Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003); Stan B.-H. Tan, "The struggle to Control Land Grabbing: State Formation on the Central Highlands Frontier under the First Republic of Vietnam (1954–1963)," in *On the Borders of State Power: Frontiers in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region*, ed. Martin Gainsborough (London: Routledge, 2003), 35–50.
12. Nancy B. Graves and Theodore D. Graves, "Adaptive Strategies in Urban Migration," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 3, no. 1 (1974): 117–151.
13. Interview with members of Ea Súp community, January 2009, Ea Súp, Đắk Lắk.
14. All informant names mentioned in this essay are pseudonyms.
15. Many thanks to Philip Taylor for this observation.
16. Danièle Bélanger and Jianye Liu, "Education and Inequalities in Rural Vietnam in the 1990s," *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 28, no. 1 (March 2008): 51–65.
17. James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 82–122.
18. Mary Beth Mill, *Thai Women in the Global Labor Force: Consuming Desires, Contested Selves* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999).
19. Ibid; Pun Ngai, *Made in China: Women Factory Workers in a Global Workplace* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Aihwa Ong, *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline: Factory Women in Malaysia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987).
20. Douglas S. Massey, *Worlds in Motion: Understanding International Migration at the End of the Millennium* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 21ff.